



*By the Ven. E. E. Holmes, B.D.,
Archdeacon of London*

Dear Agnes
with loving birthday wishes
from Betsey

21st April 1926



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The
Meaning of the Months

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The Meaning of the Months

BY THE VEN. E. E. HOLMES, B.D.
*Archdeacon of London, Canon of St. Paul's, and Hon.
Domestic Chaplain to Queen Alexandra*

*With Twelve Illustrations in colour, from water-colour
drawings by ISABEL BONUS*



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TO
THE CHILDREN ON THE SANDS

AUGUST, 1909

Preface



THESE short talks about the Months are reprinted, with some few alterations, from *The Sign* of 1909.

The design on the cover (the year's circle of eternity, surrounded by the months' flowers of time, with triumphant inscription within) will tell its own story.

Will some one give us, on a Christmas or Summer home stage, Christina Rossetti's exquisite little *Pageant—The Months?*¹

E. E. H.

¹ *Poetical Works*, p. 48, Ed. 1904.

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The Bear's Motto



*God never does, nor suffers to be done
But what thou wouldst,
Couldst thou as clearly see
The end of all He does as well as He.*



JANUARY

The Meaning of the Months



January



ONCE upon a time, about 330 B.C., a Greek sculptor, named Lysippus, gave to the world a statue dedicated to *Time*. On it he wrote the following epigram :—

“What is thy name, statue?”

“I am called Opportunity.”

“Who made thee?”

“Lysippus.”

“Why art thou standing on thy toes?”

“To show that I stay but for a moment.”

“Why hast thou wings on thy feet?”

“To show how quickly I pass by.”

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“But why is thy hair so long on thy forehead?”

“That men may seize me when they meet me.”

“Why is thy head so bald behind?”

“To show that when I have once passed I cannot be caught.”

Here in statue and in epigram Lysippus still talks : here is a thought for us, as well as for 330 B.C. And the thought is this—Seize the New Year with all its chances. Chances must be caught ; caught by the forelock ; caught on the wing. *Tempus fugit*.¹ No great scholarship is needed to translate the Latin into English, but to translate its language into life needs a higher order of schooling.

A BEGINNING AND AN ENDING

Well, one year has flown into another. The beginning of a New Year has come.

But are not these divisions of time purely arbitrary—mere matters of clocks, chronometers, and sundials? “*Time*,” Aristotle tells us, “*is the perceived number of successive movements*,” and this century is the product of the last, just as the next century will be the “successive movement” to the present. True, the years roll into each other ; but divisions

¹ Time flies.

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of time are useful for practical purposes, and each month is, in a real sense, both a beginning and an ending.

We start with *January*, the month which, for more than two centuries, has been to Europeans what the month "Abib" was to the Jews—"This month shall be unto you the *beginning* of months : it shall be the *first* month of the year." (*Exod.* xii. 2.)

January is derived from *Janus*, greatest of all Roman gods, "*the god of beginnings.*" To him the Romans dedicated all their beginnings, the beginnings of the years, months, days ; the beginning of every enterprise. And they might have done worse. At least, they give us a hint. If for *Janus* we read *Jesus*, and dedicate all our beginnings to Him, our true *Alpha* and *Omega*, life will go better for us all.

Again, it is the *first* month in the year, and there is something sacred about the first of anything—the first Communion, the first child, the first home-leaving. They all have their own indefinable something. Beginnings control endings. Much will depend upon the way in which we start "the first month in the year."

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THE OPEN DOOR

But a first suggests a second ; and it is so with January. January opens the door to all the other months. The very word means "a door." It comes from the Latin *Januarius* (called after Janus), connected with *janua*, a door. And it has in it this special meaning. The Romans placed the doors of their houses under the protection of the god *Janus*. Here, again, if for *Janus* we read *Jesus*, Who is "the Door" to all that is high and happy, if we see Him as He is pictured by Holman Hunt in S. Paul's Cathedral, if we see in Him "the beautiful Gate" of the temple of life, and pass through Him — *per Jesum Christum Dominum nostrum*—into all we say and do, we shall begin the New Year well.

For it is the house-door, the entrance to house-life that we need specially to place under His protection just now. The happiness, even the existence of home life hangs on the holiness of the Marriage Vow, so recklessly desecrated in Statute and in practice. Marriage is a door, and it should be entered with that *guaranteed* grace which is promised to the Church. Marriage at a Registry Office is as indissoluble as marriage in church, but

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it adds no *guaranteed* grace such as is secured, if asked for sincerely and honestly, by the ordained and covenanted way. Grace will, of course, be given if sought for by any earnest method; but, when one method has been prescribed, it is at least risky deliberately to adopt another. Marriage is a beginning. It cannot be flooded with too much grace. It is a door to be opened with benediction, dedicated, and re-dedicated on each anniversary, to the God of beginnings.

THE DOORS OF LIFE

Life is full of doors, and each is the opening to a fuller life. There is the nursery door opening into the schoolroom life; the schoolroom door opening into the college (or other) life; the college door opening into the life of vocation: and all these doors opening into the great "gate which leadeth into the city" of life. Life is full of Januaries, full of starts, full of sunny mornings.

The pious Roman prayed every morning to Janus, the god of beginnings, as *Matutinus Pater*, the *father of the morning*.

We, too, have our "Father of lights," and might do worse than begin each morning with an aspira-

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tion to Him as *Matutinus Pater*. It is said that in Delhi there is a latticed window called *Darshani*, the seeing place, where, in the time of Akbar, the people met to see the king. Until they had seen him, they saw no one, and took no food. Morning by morning the king appeared to them in royal robes as a reward to their loyalty. It is a morning parable full of beauty for us.

And if He is the Door of the morning, He is no less the Guardian of the night. The quaint old custom at a Watch-Night Service of opening the church door once to turn the devil out, and opening it again to let in the Christ, has a mystic meaning for us night by night. Night engagements often decide the fate of a battle.

LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD

Again, Janus was worshipped by the Romans as the two-faced god: *two*-faced, not *double*-faced (which would imply but one face with two expressions). Janus looked backwards with one face and forwards with the other. The symbolism is suggestive. We enter January Janus-faced, with "eyes behind and before," looking back to the past year, and on to the next.

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This is January's message to us : "Look back ; look on." And as Janus (i.e., Dianus) was worshipped by the Romans as God of the Sun, let us praise God for all that is sunny and bright in our lives. Look back. Open the back numbers of the past, and you will read many a sunny passage. If you cannot be bright with the radiance of innocence, be radiant with the brightness of penitence. The Sun-God still shines on many a bit of the puzzle of life.

Look on ; the face that looks forward is the happy face. Begin the year brightly ; begin it with a clean slate. The Confessions and Absolutions in the Prayer Book will put you in the way of doing it. Then, at the end, may you utter the proud boast of Sir Walter Scott, "I have injured no man's morals, I have spoilt no man's happiness." A man has no right to spoil a woman's happiness : a woman has no right to spoil a man's happiness. Don't make life harder for another, and you will make it easier for yourself. Put your shoulder under another's burden, and give it a lift. Contribute your quota of sunshine to life, wherever you are. *Nulla dies sine linea*—no day without its trace—and let every day bear the trace of the good till

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the great year-book is made up, and "time shall be no more."

"Wass-hael," as our Saxon forefathers used to say—"To your health." Let us drink to each other in the old *poculum caritatis*—a true "loving cup"—and it will be all the more full of love if empty of all else !



FEBRUARY

FEBRUARY

February



POOR old February ! with its lopped life and shortened career. Only twenty-eight days ! What a shame ! Why should it live less long than other months ? And the worst of it is that it is all the fault of the others !—anyhow of July and August, and especially August.

A SHORT LIFE

For how did it all come about ? Well, it was the old game of “grab” that did it ! And the game was played by very great persons indeed—by Augustus and Julius Cæsar, and by old “Father Time.” Jealousy (as in many other cases) was at the bottom of it all. July, dedicated to Julius Cæsar, had thirty-one days, whereas August, dedicated to Augustus Cæsar, had only thirty days. Augustus objected to having one day less than Julius. So what did he do ? Why, there was

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a poor little month called February, dedicated to no grand emperor, and with only a short twenty-nine days—and nobody would make a fuss about stealing anything from February! So, on the principle of “hit-a-month-when-it’s-down,” or “grab-what-you-can,” Augustus takes a day from February, and adds it to his own month, August, thus leaving our poor month only twenty-eight days,

“Excepting leap-year, when’s the time
February’s days are twenty-nine.”

No wonder February looks a bit dismal and dowdy after such shabby treatment. No wonder the clouds always seem crying, and the rivers overflowing, and that the dirty dykes or ditches give the month a bad name, and a spiteful old proverb has nicknamed it “February-fill-dyke” :—

“February fill the dyke
Either with black or white”—

i.e., with rain or snow. And the sun shines so little, and the slush spoils so much, that the month hasn’t got the same chances as other months with its meagre twenty-eight or twenty-nine days—just as some of us haven’t got the same chances by twenty-eight to thirty-one, that others have.

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But there ! the Time-fairies who know all about it are very wise folk, and they could tell us that to have most time doesn't always mean to do most work ; and that the twenty-eight-day people often put in as much as the thirty-one-day people. Anyhow, February has its own twenty-eight days, and we must make the most of them. Each month, longer or shorter, has its own chances—for a month's a month for a' that—and the very shortness of the month issues as challenge.

NO HOME TO LOSE

Just because it is so short, there is no time to lose. "Hurry up," it says : don't waste time : don't get slack : be prompt. It sounds like an echo from our beautiful Burial Office : "Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live . . . and is cut down like a flower." If he has but a short time to live, he has no time to waste—for each "month" is the necessary period of preparation for the "month" which follows. It is so short that we mustn't laze or dally. And then, short or long, twenty-eight-day or thirty-one, man is "cut down like a flower"—when, like a flower, he has done his predestined work.

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“Like a flower.” And a flower lives wholly for others, to make the garden beautiful, to adorn a dinner-table, to brighten a hospital, to be converted into medicine, to teach us something of that most underrated of all the five senses—the sense of smell. Can man do more?

“THE FAIR MAID OF FEBRUARY”

“Like a flower.” And there is one flower special to February, so special that it is called “The fair maid of February,” the snowdrop. It tells the story of February as perhaps no other flower could do. Its pure white beauty speaks of purification, and this is the month of the Purification.

February comes from *Februarius*, so named from *Februa*, the Roman Festival of Purification, or Expiation—a festival celebrated on the fifteenth of the month. There is a beautiful thought which connects, though probably with no historical connection, the Pagan Feast of Purification on February 15th with the Christian Feast of the Purification on February 2nd, the Feast of that “pure Virgin” whose most true title is at once the *Mater Purissima*, and the “Fair Maid of February.”

And in this sense there is something most fair and

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fascinating about "February-fill-dyke." The snow-drop peeps through all.

Thus February appeals to that great instinct of human nature, the longing for the pure. For if January has opened "the door" to all the other months, February finds us landed at once in the wrestling-yard — and soon indeed the snowdrop droops its head in shame at our loss of purity. Purity is derived from a root which means "unmixed," and soon we find ourselves in the land of mixed motives, mixed aims, mixed intentions. We are glad, then, right glad, to think of February as the month of Purity.

WHITE SOULS

It reminds us, too, of our Baptismal birthday. The snowdrop is the flower of the font. The font was the first "fount" which "cleansed us from all unrighteousness"; and then when sin spoils our white we find another "Fountain" for "the remission of sins," never to be dried up, never ceasing to play, in which, as the Poet Cowper tells us,

"Sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains."

It is strange and beautiful what a hold this craving

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for the pure has on the most stained. Who does not remember Lowell's poem of *The Forlorn*—where,

“One poor, heart-broken, outcast girl
Faces the East wind's searching flaws,
And as about her heart they whirl,
Her tattered cloak more tightly draws.”

Who can forget how that “one poor, heart-broken, outcast girl” stands outside the cheery room in the well-warmed house, and—

“Lingers where a ruddy glow
Streams onward through an open shutter,
Adding more bitterness to woe,
More loneliness to desertion utter”—

and then, as she “hears the woman's voice within, singing sweet words her childhood knew,” how all the best in her comes back to life, and how “old faces and the friendly past” creep round her again and restir in her the purest, brightest of all God's gifts to woman, the gift of womanhood.

It is the aim to make life one long February, one long Feast of Purification, which our month suggests. What ideal could be higher? Canon Scott Holland has let us into the secret power of a woman's life, when he writes of Jenny Lind, that sweet singer of England :—“I can hardly imagine

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a man who would, in her presence, venture on a doubtful allusion, or a hazardous innuendo. Never shall I forget the vivid vigour of her description to me of her first parting with a friend who had made some such reference. Certainly I can hardly imagine her being thought a genial or popular companion in the green-room of an opera-house ; but ah ! how one longed to have once heard, ringing through a theatre, the young-girl voice which had been penetrated through and through by this simple and haughty innocence."

"February-fill-dyke," our month may, and may with truth, be called ; but February make-white shall be its favourite title for us, for whom it has been touched with the wand of the Wonderful. For us, at least, its legend shall be the legend of Gareth, "son of Lot and Bellicent":—

"Man am I grown, and a man's work must I do,
Follow the Christ, the King,
Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the King—
Else, wherefore born?"

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March



MARCH! How thoroughly British it is! Blundering along and smashing everything that gets in its way; storming and ramping and raging, knocking things about, blowing down trees right and left—it's for all the world like the typical Englishman fussing and fuming at some Continental railway station, where all the natives are "foreigners"!—and the said foreigners stand, "stormed at with shot and shell," wondering what it's all about, and what all the tornado means. It's only March let loose in the person of John Bull, only a "bluff King Hal" in the person of a lineal descendant. It is the "March-Englishman" whom Spenser would describe as:

"Sturdy March, with brows full sternly bent,
And armed strongly!"

Yes! March is essentially English, and as such it means much to us. From our earliest days we



MARCH

MARCH

English have had to fight for our existence. We are true clients of March—for March is named from Mars, the god of war. We English can understand just what the old fighting Romans felt when they made March (the fighting month) the first month in their year. There is something more than unmeaning bluster about the Englishman who is proverbially “as mad as a March hare.” He must fight, and he knows it—and the English Churchman knows it too. There is a God of Battles other than Mars for him, and “the Lord of Hosts is His Name.”

THREE KINDS OF WARFARE

There are three kinds of war every Englishman must fight in.

First, there is *National* war. Patriotism is Christian. Does not *Magnificat* itself—song of the ideal woman-patriot—sing of Him Who has specially “holpen His servant *Israel*”? The Englishman must fight for his country.

But can it ever be right for a *Christian* to fight, for a *Christian* world to go to war? No! never *right*. But the world is not yet Christian; the abstract choice between right and wrong is not yet the Christian's. Again and again in life we

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have to choose, not between right and wrong, but between a greater and a lesser wrong. It may be, it often is, a lesser wrong for the Christian to fight than to fly. I see a big brute of a man or woman ill-treating a child or an animal. What am I to do? It is, I know, unchristian to fight; but in such a case it is even still more unchristian not to fight. It is a choice between two wrongs, and I must choose the lesser. My country may be invaded. It is unchristian to go to war; but it is even more unchristian to let my country undergo all the horrors of a siege of Jerusalem by not fighting. Until the red-cross of Calvary has won the day, the red-cross of the ambulance must have its quota "for the right."

"Better with Hector on the field to die,
Than with a perfumed Paris turn and fly."

Then there is *Ecclesiastical* war.

Loyalty to the truth may sometimes demand battle. Every single clause in the three great Creeds of Christendom is the outcome of an attack: each has been won, after attack, by fighting for the Faith. The Articles of the Creeds are to the Churchman what the Articles of War are to the

MARCH

soldier and sailor. They are, in each case, the authoritative statements of authorized experts, and they are drawn up for times of war. Fight we must, when the sacred deposit entrusted "to us and our children for ever" is at stake.

"I know not if for England's Church
Still darker days impend,
Her foes are many, and but few
The citadel defend ;
Yet still our God is pitiful,
The saints are strong and wise,
And wield a weapon which the world
May hate but not despise.
For still is heard in English fanes
The voice of daily prayer,
And still the daily Sacrifice
Is duly offered there.
At English altars where the lights
Symbolically show
His Presence Who, the world's true Light,
Still tarries with us so."

Every educational battle, every "Church" battle, indeed—if it be "for God and the right," and not for gain or greed—is simply a Christian's duty ; and woe to him who, through cowardice or indifference or lazy self-indulgence, stands cynically aside, idly looking on at the fray. The curse of Meroz, as all history shows, is a self-acting curse. It acts automatically

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on deserters. Even "the Lamb" must fight, before it can be written that "the Lamb shall overcome them."¹

"PLEDGED WARRIORS"

And there is the *hand-to-hand* fight, in which each must engage with sin and wrong whenever and wherever we meet it. The fight with sin is essentially "a soldier's battle." Battalions are made up of units, and it is the sum total of trained units that makes the best battalion. It is so, spiritually. At our Baptism we were enlisted as "soldiers," as fighters.

Etymologically speaking, the word "soldier" is akin to the Latin *solidus*, a *shilling*.² As soldiers of the Cross, we have "taken the King's shilling," and pledged ourselves to the warrior life. Christ was the God of War : the Christian must follow the Christ, or he ceases to be a Christian. As Bishop Heber puts it :

"The Son of God goes forth to war
A kingly crown to gain ;
His blood-red banner streams afar ;
Who follows in His train ?"

We do. If not, we brand ourselves as the meanest

¹ Rev. xvii. 14.

² The letters £. s. d. stand for *libræ*, *solidi*, *denarii*, the Latin words for pounds, shillings, and pence.

MARCH

of men. The fair-weather Churchman is the curse of his cause.

Again, March is derived from Mars, and Mars means "the crusher," "the slayer." It is in the crushing out of selfishness, in the slaying of sin, that each must bear his part—and bear it as a matter of course, as part of his day's duty in the army. Study Watts's *Happy Warrior* if you would wish for an inspiration on the daily field of battle.

But, as our month reminds us, the fight won't last for long. The old proverb is as true, mystically, as it so often is, literally—March "comes in like a lion, and goes out like a lamb."

CHOOSING OUR WEAPONS

Battle doesn't last for ever—other forces are at work, other appeals are made than to the law of combat. Even in natural war, the lion-policy has not wholly defeated the lamb. Counsels of peace prevail more and more, coming from those who realize best, and from experience, the terrors of the opposite. Ecclesiastically, too, we are all getting to understand each other's standpoint better—in spite of the occasional and violent outbreak of the "untutored savage" still within us. We are learning in private life to

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fight less and less for things not worth fighting for, in spite of the sphinx-like character of that ugly-headed serpent called Self-interest. We are accepting as true the old story of the battle between the sun and the wind, and are finding that the warm and kindly sun "came in first," and made the traveller take off the cloak, which the blustering wind only made him fold the closer round him.

We are, that is, learning to *choose our weapons* rather than to cease fighting—for the fight must, in one form or another, go on until our probation is ended. Not until then will the final "cease firing" be heard.

March, then, bids us quit us like men and be strong. It says, "Gird thee with thy sword upon thy thigh." It trumpets the cry, "Fight the good fight with all thy might." It is a wild and stormy month, and is meant to brace us for the fray.

March tells us to "die fighting": to make our own that fine old epitaph in Much Wenlock churchyard, on the grave of one Thomas Harper, who died June 16, 1863, aged 88 :

"Here lies an old soldier whom you may applaud,
He fought many battles when he was abroad ;
But the sharpest engagement that e'er he was in
Was the conquest of Self in the Victory of sin."



APRIL

APRIL

April



LIFE is not all March. It has its April showers as well as its March winds. Character needs both—the stern, drastic discipline of the drill-ground, and the soft, refreshing showers and sunshine. For life is neither all dark nor light. As Tennyson puts it very prettily, in *The Grandmother* :

“Shadow and shine is life, little Annie, flower and thorn.”

If all were “shadow,” we should expire from moral anæmia ; if all were “shine,” we should die from moral effeminacy. Only, as so many seem to live in the shade, it is well to remember that there is “the sunny side of the street” as well as the shady ; that there is an April in most lives, when, as the word suggests, the earth “opens” (*aperire*, to open), and the dark underground passages are thrown open to the sun.

We have not yet reached the full flowers of May,

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but we have left the cold winds of March. Life is beginning to "open" with new possibilities, with the joyous chant of the singer, "Summer is coming, summer is coming."

There is an Easter in April, as well as a Palm Sunday and a Good Friday.

"And the gladsome Easter sunlight
Supersedes the Lenten gloom ;
Bursts upon the ears the tidings
'Christ is risen from the tomb.'"

Indeed, our Anglo-Saxon ancestors called the month Ostermonath or Easter-monad, Easter-month, i.e., the month of the East, the month of sunrise—surely some relation, if not in direct line, to Eostre, or Eastre, the name of the goddess whose festivities were held in April, and whose name is from a root which means "to shine."

APRIL'S MESSAGE

This is the meaning of April. Life is not all grim and gruesome ; it is not all dark tunnels and chilly shade. God is not all frowns. And if He seems sometimes to frown more than to smile, our great Olney poet reminds us that, in no mere poetic phrase,

"Beneath, a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face."

APRIL

This is the message of April. It shines through the gloom of March and points us on to the sky of May.

It is cheering to remember that there is an April in every year—that the *Lux Mundi* does “shine through the gloom” of the darkest pages of history and point us upward to some higher ideal. The whole story of the Church is an illustration of it. Never, in the darkest moment in Church history, has He “left Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven”—those “soft refreshing showers” of grace which revived the Church in her coldest periods. The Church has her April showers as well as her March winds, and she cannot do without one or the other.

So it is with the personal life. Here, too, is “shadow and shine,” “flower and thorn,” “frown and smile,” “cloud and sunshine.” We need them all. We want, and we have, our April as well as our March; and it means all the more to us because April comes after March. Again and again we have pleaded, “Shine through the gloom”; and again and again, just when we least expected it, just when night was darkest, dawn was nearest, a flash of light shot through the dark and the dim, and a

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guiding finger pointed us to the skies. And, surely, the sky—the ideal, the best—never looked half so “bright and beautiful” as it looked through the gloom.

And yet not all at once do we get out of our March winds. April showers are like the after-sob of the child. Its trouble has gone, it is safe in some sheltering arms, it can see the old familiar face once more, it is at rest—but it still sobs on, even with a smile upon its face. It represents a strange state in our spiritual growth—a state which cannot be put into words, but belongs to the sphere of experience. It can only be likened to April showers. And we would not miss it. It is a distinct period—felt, but nothing more. We want our April in life as well as March and May.

THE “APRIL MOOD”

There is, indeed, one thought which deals less kindly with our month. There is the “April mood,” which is certainly not easy to manage or to live with. The character which is liable to these April moods is not the finest character in the world—not, perhaps, as characters go, in the first class. Well, God often works great things through second-

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class characters. We can't all be top of the class, and we don't all keep top when we get there. Don't despise April-mood characters. They are trying to live with ; they are crosses to work with. But they have their place in the world, just as April has its place in the months, and they have their own winning charm, which keeps the world from getting grey before it is old.

" APRIL TEARS "

Then, too, there are " April tears." They are soon over ; they do not come from a very deep well ; they are not the outflow of the deepest natures. But they, too, have their message. Happy the one who has only April tears to shed. " Mother, my tears are clean tears," said the little child. May our April tears be clean tears—tears untainted by the stain of " some foul spot."

And then one loves April, because it tells of the children—sobbing one moment, beaming the next ; floating in the rainbow ; so like April in their showers and moods and tears. April always seems the month of the young—the month of the lark and the lamb. It is the " opening " of so much that must come, *nolens volens*, into the lives of little

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ones that we love to linger on it, and pray about it, and make it last as long as we can.

"A BIT OF APRIL"

And April tells of "lighter moods"—of poetry, and fiction, and fun, and frolic, and of all that lifts and lessens the burden of hundreds of lives as monotonous as the note of a cuckoo. Its very variableness has in it an antidote to the grim sameness of thousands of plodding, grinding souls. Oh, to put a bit of April into their dead-level, red-brick lives ! How one longs to give them sight and sound of fields and flowers, of the April cowslip, bluebell, and lily, of woodlark and whitethroat and linnet, of "lords and ladies" and of buzzing bee, and of all that April suggests and symbolizes. Well, it will come some day. Meanwhile, whenever and wherever life's April gives an opening," let us seize it and use it to make things grow better and brighter. It is much merely to "shine through the gloom" of another's life, repoint such an one, together with ourselves, to the skies, to revive an old ideal, an old longing, in one who has lost it, to "bring a bit of April" into just that little bit of earth in which our lot is cast.

APRIL

Somehow, April always reminds one of the splendid hope wrapt up in Tennyson's *Amphion* :

" My father gave a park to me,
But it is wild and barren,
A garden, too, with scarce a tree,
And waster than a warren ;
Yet say the neighbours when they call,
It is not bad but good land,
And in it is *the germ of all*
That grows within the woodland.

And I must work through months of toil
And years of cultivation
Upon my proper patch of soil
To grow my own plantation.
I'll take the showers as they fall,
And will not vex my bosom ;
Enough if at the end of all
A little garden blossom."

THE MEANING OF THE MONTHS

May



THE very word is a joy. It tells of garlands and hawthorn and maypole, of legend and life and love. Is it not in mystic meaning "the month of Mary"? Truly, May is the month of marvels: "for lo! the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come."¹ What poet can interpret May like the old, old poet of Inspiration?

May is the child of Maia, the goddess of growth, the goddess of increase—and what is more wondrous than growth? It has a beauty of its own, just because it is growing. May is the month of movement, of progress, of development. As such, the ancients dedicated it to Maia—as such we consecrate it to God, to that God of Whom S. Paul writes, "It is God that giveth the increase."

¹ Cant. ii. 11.



MAY

MAY

THE VALUE OF GROWTH

For all growth is of value only in so far as it is consecrated to the Highest. Intellectual growth is one of man's splendours—a splendour to be illuminated indefinitely in the land of light, but it is nothing short of a “will-o'-the-wisp,” unless it is dedicated to Him Who is the Source of all growth. What is the use of teaching a child everything, if we leave out the one thing which makes anything worth knowing? Spiritual growth is the divine ambition of every loyal soul, but it only lands us in conceit and self-complacency unless it is consecrated to Him Who is the Source of all real growth. Physical growth is a fine thing, cultivated, developed, trained to the highest pitch of athleticism—but it only leads to the lowest type of animalism unless it is used for the best and the highest. It is strange how far the Christian lags behind the Pagan in this consecration of growth. Perhaps it is because it is so subtle, so silent, so mysterious, so little noticed at the time. But few gifts are better worth studying and consecrating than the gift of growth.

And, as May reminds us, all nature is growing most wondrously in this month. May is the month

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of flowers, and of one special flower, "the hawthorn," called specifically after the month—"may." Is there anything quite like it—quite like the first stroll in a country lane, to a town dweller, on a May morning? Is there any blossom quite like the may blossom, the old hawthorn-bush?

Strange thoughts and legends crowd round the mind, as one breaks the bow or plucks a sprig.

MAY LEGENDS

We think of the lovely old legend that the crown of thorns was made from its branches. "Then was our Lord," so runs the legend, "led into a garden . . . and the Jews scorned Him, and made Him a crown of the branches of the *Aubépine*, that is whitethorn, which grew in the same garden, and set it on His head." It reminds us of the old belief, that because of this honour conferred upon the may or hawthorn, no harm could come to him who bare a branch or twig thereof, "for he that beareth a branch on him thereof, no thunder or manner of tempest may hurt him, and in ye house that it is in no evil ghost may enter."

We love to recall the legend of the "Glastonbury Thorn," the may, the hawthorn which blossomed

MAY

out of season, and sprang from the staff of S. Joseph of Arimathæa—the legendary founder of the Early British Church. As May comes round we would not willingly forget the story—how, that on arriving at Glastonbury on Christmas Day, he stuck his hawthorn staff into the earth, as a symbol of settlement, and how it at once put forth branches and blossomed—and blossomed year by year on Christmas Day until the Puritans cut it down.

We should be poorer historians without the old legends which twine themselves in poetry round the bare prose of history. May has its own fairy-fancies, and we can ill-afford to lose them in a prosaic “Gradgrind” age of “facts, hard facts.” There is still room in our hearts for the May-queen, and the maypole, and the “going a-maying.” These old May-day memories tell of lingering rites instituted by our forefathers in honour of Flora, goddess of flowers, to whom the last four days in May were dedicated. May reminds us that we are young still, and we would keep young as long as there is a sprig of may to be worn—and when we grow old we would wear it still and be the youngest child of all.

THE MEANING OF THE MONTHS

THE ISLAND OF HONEY

And the bees ! They say that May is the month of the bees, and tell how, once upon a time, in days before the Romans landed on our shores, England was called by the Welsh the *Island of Honey*. They tell that the first sound which the first discoverers heard was the murmur of the bees in our primeval forests, busy and bustling about, long before a human soul had disturbed their noisy silence.

If only we could win back for our country her right to the old Welsh name—the Island of Honey ! the island where all was sweet and pure ; where there was work for all workers, and workers for all work, hives for all the bees, and bees for all the hives, where whatsoever things were true, and pure, and lovely, and of good report, were thought of first, and money-making and money-spending were thought of second. The Island of Honey ! God make us more what we ought to be.

THE MONTH OF MARY

And we must not forget that, by a pretty conceit, May has been called “the month of Mary.” Of

MAY

all May flowers there is no sweeter flower than Mary.

“To love the Mother, people say,
Is to defraud the Son,
For them, alas ! there dawns no May
Until their hearts are won :
Then when their hearts begin to burn—
Ah ! then to Jesus true,
And loving whom He loves they learn
To love Saint Mary too.”

For S. Mary is every woman's ideal : she is every man's faire-ladye—“our Lady,” as she is called in the Calendar of “Lessons proper for Holy Days,” in our English Prayer Book. However imaginary any connection between “May” and “Mary” may be (and historically it is, of course, wholly imaginary), May is the month of chivalry. Never was it more necessary to preach the crusade of chivalry. Chivalry from manhood to womanhood and from men to women ; chivalry from the strong to the weak, from the young to the old, from juniors to seniors.

It is a thought to be remembered that *May* is a word allied to *Major* (as *June* is to *Junior*), and it is lowering to watch the growing neglect of the claims of age, standing, and experience. It may be, probably it is, the fault of the “major” as much

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as the “junior”—but it is bad for them both. Perhaps it is less glaring than it was a few years ago, and things are on the mend.

So, May has beauties of its own : beauties which after all are but symbols of flowers more beauteous, garlands more mystic, happiness more supreme than that of “the merry, merry month of May.” Is there not a mystic beauty in the meaning of the month as we look on to “that brightest of all mornings” which our hearts are waiting for ? One loves the underlying thought in one of the most touching of all May melodies :—

“ Ah ! my heart is weary, waiting—
Waiting for the may :
Waiting for the pleasant rambles,
Where the fragrant hawthorn brambles,
With the woodbine alternating,
Scent the dewy way,
Ah ! my heart is weary, waiting—
Waiting for the may ! ”

But it is only the weariness of hope deferred—
not of hope baulked.



JUNE

JUNE

June



WHAT does the word mean? It comes from *Junius*, the name of a Roman *gens*, and a *gens* was, roughly speaking, a clan, the individuals of which joined together were called *gentiles*. Each *gens* was made up of a number of branches or families, and each family was made up of individual members. Thus, in olden days, June would tell of related life.

And this related life is just what we are learning so much about in modern days. This is just what the Christian Faith teaches us for all days: "No man liveth unto himself." He cannot really be an independent atom, even if he would—any more than the particles of water in a wine-glass can be independent of each other. Christianize the old thought, and the root idea of the Church is clear. The Church is a big Brotherhood, made up of

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branches, or families, each family being made up of individuals—of individuals related to each other by spiritual, as by natural, birth.

From the highest to the lowest, universal “relationship” is the claim of the individual, and individuality is the outcome of relationship. Thus, when our King and Queen were married, the King was asked, “Wilt thou have this *woman* to thy wedded wife?”—this *particular* woman, but, “this *woman*,” just a woman, related by her womanhood to all other women. So the Queen was asked, “Wilt thou have this *man* to thy wedded husband?”—this *particular* man, but, “this *man*,” just a man, related by his manhood to all other men. We cannot grasp the idea of an individual man apart from other men who make his individuality possible. There would be nothing individual about him, unless there were others from whom to distinguish him. And even his very individuality is, as far as we can grasp it, largely the sum total of a whole pedigree of individualities of which he is the resultant product—father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, great grandfather, great grandmother, and so on. June, “the gens,” then, fixes our thoughts on “family” life in the

broadest sense of the words—whether it is our own “individual” family, or the family of the human race, or the Church which our Prayer Book calls the “family for which our Lord Jesus Christ was contented to be betrayed.”

OUR RELATED LIFE

The terms of this related life are, for us, found in “Our duty towards our Neighbour” in the Church of England Catechism. We may well study and re-study it, with its priceless code of morals, and its guiding principles for all corporate and collective life. It is, in itself, a magnificent syllabus of Christian social teaching, and, by itself, would make the Church Catechism an invaluable deposit, worth fighting for to the end.

What part then are we playing in family life, in human life, in Church life? We cannot stand as isolated units, receiving from it without contributing towards it; we cannot—that is the best of it—contribute towards it without receiving from it. It is a perpetual round of give and get—of getting that we may give, of giving that we may get yet more to give.

There is another sense, too, in which we may

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re-present the meaning of the month. The old Roman "gens" had certain sacred rites belonging to it. These rites, all members of the "gens" were bound to perform, and each "gens" seems to have had its own special place for the performance of these "sacra," as they were called. Again Christianize the thought, and you get united worship, "common" prayer, corporate Communion, guilds, unions, societies—each with its own rites and status, each independent, yet all interdependent, "one by one," yet "one with another," separate, yet combined, all part of a whole, and the completion of the whole dependent on the perfection of the parts.

But isn't all this rather a dry line of thought for a lovely month like June?—our "Midsummer-monath," as our Anglo-Saxon forbears used to call it. Well, they called it also the Sear-monath, or dry month; and although they meant something quite different, it will do for an excuse!

THE FLOWER OF JUNE

And, after all, June never can be anything but full of "the sweet and the lovely." The flower of June, the rose, England's emblem, would make that

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impossible. It belongs to us as no other flower does. It is all our own. We lend it to other nations, as we lend Milton or Shakespeare; but it is our property, and we look for it, and find it, in June.

The rose! How full it is of mystic meaning; we Westerns miss a world of thought and beauty which is open to the Easterns. To the Oriental, the flower-world is as real as a world peopled with human beings.

“In Eastern lands they talk in flowers,
And they tell in a garland their love and their cares.
Each blossom that blooms in their garden bowers
On its leaves a mystical language bears.”

We have caught the thought more or less in some of our English flower-names, and have associated the flowers with our “sacra.” We have the flowers of the Church—the Lent Lily, the Michaelmas Daisy, the Pink of Pentecost, the S. John’s Wort, the Harebell of S. George of England, the Cowslip of S. Catherine of Sienna, the Madonna Lily, and the Christmas Rose. But we are prosaic at the best. Even where the rose is concerned, we are commonplace enough and take it into our “York and Lancaster” battlefields. One likes to think it was there, even amid all the carnage and wickedness

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of war—just as one loves to picture the Madonna and Child at Nazareth, with all its sin and shame. But it is very English !

“UNDER THE ROSE”

The rose, however, has a simpler, softer, “June” meaning for us. It is one of those flowers which recall some lovely deed of saintship !

“Each flower is as a written book,
Recalling, by memorial quaint,
The holy deed of martyred saint.”

What does the rose recall ? If no one special deed—though the “Golden Rose” of history might well suggest many a doughty deed done for Christ—it tells, at least, of one of the roots of saintship. For the rose tells of reticence. Silence and saintship !—how often they go together ! It is said that one-third of the sin of the world is caused by sins of the tongue. And there is one special form of reticence suggested by the rose. It is found in the phrase *sub rosa*, such familiar Latin that we have almost adopted it as English—“under the rose.” In its old meaning the saying tells of things not to be repeated. Amongst the ancients the rose was dedicated to Harpocrates, the God of Silence, and was suspended

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over the tables in banqueting halls, as a sign that the talk of the guests sitting underneath it—"under the rose"—was private.

The teaching is as obvious as it is necessary, for moderns as well as ancients. And not in banqueting halls only must we live *sub rosa*, though many a bitter jealousy and broken friendship would be avoided if things were not repeated "after the party." As in Smyrna there is a street named "The Street of Roses," because in it there are "roses, roses, all the way," the "*sub rosa*" life is to be lived everywhere—in public and in private, at home and in society, at work, on a holiday. It is a form of "the hidden life" which June places before its clients. *Verbum sat sapienti.*

THE MEANING OF THE MONTHS

July



THIS is the month in which Julius Cæsar was born ; the month which Mark Antony named “ July ” after the great Julius, probably selecting it as being the month when the sun was usually most potent.

The mere mention of the month — July — takes many of us back in thought to our school-days, and all that long line of history associated with the name of “ Julius Cæsar.” Back it takes us to names and books of great giants of literature then living—Cicero, Horace, Virgil, Livy, Ovid, and many another name famous in the past. And back it takes us to Julius Cæsar.

What strange memories the name evokes—some old schoolroom, old school faces and friends, old and well-worn copies of *Cæsar’s Commentaries*, telling the tale of his two invasions of Britain—all come before us. Back it carries us to our early



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history. We stand—it is 55 B.C.—on the white chalk rocks of the Kentish coast, and gaze out to sea—that sea which was ever the first safeguard of our insular position. What are those tiny black specks which seem to move nearer and nearer as we watch the waves? They are the ships of that very *Julius Cæsar*—"Czar" of Rome—after whom our month is named. On they come, galley after galley, flying the standard of the terrible Roman Eagle; they close in upon us; an officer jumps into the waters, crying, "Follow me!" and in a minute—a minute fraught with consequences we feel to-day—the Roman legions are in Britain. We learnt it all, over and over again, years ago, and up it leaps before us every time we use the word July.

THE "BACKLOOK" AND OUTLOOK

And we ask, this July, when so much looks difficult and puzzling in our Church and country, What has the meaning of the month to say to us? Just this. Good comes in spite of evil—though good never comes, and never can come, out of evil. Thistles cannot bring forth figs, nor figs thistles—though either may grow in spite of the other. And good has come to us English folk in spite

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of the dismal outlook for Britain on August 26th, fifty-five years before the Christ was born. What could have looked blacker for Britain than when, from eighty galleys, Julius Cæsar's hosts landed on our coast and beat back the British hordes? What could have seemed darker than when, a year hence, the same Julius brought a fleet of eight hundred ships and again defeated the islanders? What could have looked more hopeless for Britain's future than when, a hundred years later, another Cæsar—Claudius Cæsar—landed and forced the poor ill-armed Britons to submit? What, indeed? What would a Boadicea, or a Caractacus, have replied if the question had been put to them? And yet history has given a very unexpected answer. The "backlook," as so often happens, reverses the outlook. For what the Britons lost by restriction they retrieved by expansion; and the Bismarckian aphorism, "Expand or perish," is, in fact, seen to be true to history. Much as they lost from intermixture with the Romans, yet in expansion of character, morals, ideals—rough as even these were among their conquerors—the Britons gained more than they lost; and, as with Saxon and Norman in later days,

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the fusion of the two races was to be for the development of both.

It is not easy to imagine the future of an island people, such as the Britons were, perpetually shut up within the barriers of their own narrow inlook. But this, mercifully, was not to be. New ideas, new ideals came with the Romans : and, sad as it must ever be to recall the extermination of hundreds of noble British families, “uplifted high in hope and heart are we” as we remember their deeds of dauntless daring in their early struggles for independence. We can stand now on the watch-tower of history, and, as we survey the past, with all that tells for and against the Roman invasion, we can see cause to thank God for Julius Cæsar. Yet no Briton could have seen it at the time.

Not a few of us can thus see a meaning in the month, in the history of our own backlook and outlook. July is not without its cheering voice from the past for us all—and for us English beyond all ; for it wraps up in one short word of four letters the story of our early, and the springs of our later history.

But there is another meaning in our month. Our

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early forebears called July *Hey Monath*, the hay month, or *Maed Monath*, the mead or meadow month, "because therein they usually mowed and made their hay harvest," and because the meadows have their special flowery July charm.

THE "HEY MONATH"

The hay harvest ! The mown grass ! They too have their own historical interest to Londoners. The Haymarket and Gracechurch (or Grasschurch) Street call up a flood of associations with Old London. Like other streets (such as Mark Lane, from Mart Lane, or Cannon Street, from Candlewick Street), they hide a wealth of meaning in their nomenclature.

The hay month ; the meadow month ! Life isn't all school-days or *Cæsar's Commentaries* ! There is the fun side too. The frolic and "laze" in the hay-field, the "Song of the Reapers as they carry home their corn," the holiday which means so much in anticipation and retrospection as well as in realization (does not *Zermatt* mean *Zermead*, or *Zermeadow* ?)—July tells us of all this and more.

And if it be our good fortune to lead the village life, to wander through the country meadows, to

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laugh and linger in the hay-field this July, let us give a thought to the lives of those who live there all the year round. Through the long autumn and winter months they often have to hibernate, isolated from outside ideas, waiting for the next season. Give the parish priest a helping hand and cheering word. He has often little to cheer him in his efforts to "keep things going" during the dark months—often with scarce enough communicants for the weekly early service, often with few books to read, few to exchange thoughts with. July will go none the less happily if it suggests an interest in village life after the holiday is over, if priest and people alike are wished a hearty God-speed in the Name of a greater Monarch than even the monarch of the month, *Julius Cæsar*.

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August



WE now reach the second of the two great historical months in the year. July, we have seen, was named after the Cæsar called Julius, probably the greatest man of antiquity. August was named after his great nephew and successor Octavius, the Cæsar styled Augustus, the august, the majestic. We have seen that, in the old Roman Calendar, the month had but 30 days. Then Augustus Cæsar stole a day from February and made it 31 days, conferring on it his own name.

We would not willingly forget the historic value connected with the month's meaning. The study of our own history is not the average Englishman's strong point, and it is certainly the English Churchman's weak point. Questions such as Welsh and English Disestablishment are making us study the past as Churchmen, and pageant after pageant throughout the country is enabling us to study it as



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English Churchmen—the Church and the nation, indeed, being so fused together that it is impossible to study one without the other. But we still need some rousing trumpet-call to make us realize our past as a living incentive for action in the present and future. History is not a mere list of facts and dates, a catalogue of “the Kings and Queens of England in order.” It is a live panorama of the past, a stage on which the great procession of acting, living realities “have their exits and their entrances in the centuries whose curtains fall and rise as the generations fall away.” To gather up this warm, living past, out of which we ourselves have sprung, is “not to have gathered a herbarium, in which dried stalks and withering flowers suggest a fragrant but a fading past ; but to have plucked roots and gathered seeds for planting and transplanting into living forms that make up the companionship of life.” That first, and that in its supreme importance to-day, does the name “August,” bristling as it does with history, suggest.

Nor is the teaching in the name itself less valuable, or less needed. There is a tendency to value less and less the “august,” the “sacred,” the venerable landmarks of our past. The mere fact

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that such a society as the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings exists, and is growingly needed, carries its own warning word; and its increasing inability to prevent the destruction of that which it exists to protect is a stronger warning still.

AUGUSTUS AND CHRIST

August! There is something about the name and history of this month which places it in a supremacy of importance on a dais all by itself. No Roman Emperor's name can ever have quite the same significance to us as that of Augustus Cæsar. Never, as long as the Christian Faith lives, can we dissociate it from the first words of the inspired story of the Nativity: "And it came to pass in those days that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus," from the monarch who named our month, "that all the world [i.e. the Roman Empire] should be taxed" (i.e. registered). Ah! if only Augustus had known it! if only he could have recognized the uncrowned King in the Bethlehem stable! if only some of his illustrious scholars could have explained to him (or indeed to themselves) the meaning of that one single word, *Incarnation*!—what homage he would have

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done, as he bent the knee to the Child, "God, of the substance of His Father before all worlds; Man, of the substance of His Mother, born in the world." But it was not to be. A picture has been drawn which suggests the scene. "Augustus was perhaps supping with Mæcenas and Horace in Rome; Herod was perhaps in his palace-fortress of Macherus a few miles off across the Judæan hills, when this Child was born in the grotto-stable at Bethlehem. The Name of the Child was inscribed next day in the census-roll, and Justin Martyr, one hundred years later, appealed to the *original documents* of the census, still preserved among the Archives of Rome." But Augustus never suspected it. No clerk in the taxing office told him who it was that wrote His Name in the census-roll; no one from that office went home and said, "We had Joseph, foster-father of the Holy Child, in the office to-day"; none looked at the register as of any special interest. Then, as now, things went on much as usual, and all the while, out of sight, and out of knowledge, the world's greatest event was being recorded. What a comment on men and things!

Augustus Cæsar has passed to his fathers. His

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name is a name, and a name only, to tens of thousands. No thrill of enthusiasm runs through the system when his name is mentioned to the million. It is preserved, indeed, in one of the months of the year, and stands for something more than a name to those who have eyes to see; but compare it now, and during the intervening years, with the Name of the unknown Child Who was born "in the days of Cæsar Augustus." What a strange comment on the real and the apparent! Why! every letter we write we date (we *should* date) as so many years from the birth of the Babe of Bethlehem. Every invoice we send out, every bill we receive, every paper we read, every magazine we take up, every monthly we open, every quarterly we buy, every advertisement we see—all are dated as being posted, or written, or sent, or received, so many days, or months, or years, from an event of such supreme importance that we calculate time itself from its happening.

THE AUGUST HOLIDAY

But we seem to have got into Christmas, and we ought to be in August—dear, hot, lazy, holiday-

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making August ! And the towns are all so stuffy, and the sea so bracing, and the country so charming, and we—we who have only just begun our break in the “daily round”—are looking with irritating and complacent pity on those misguided folk who took their holiday in July ! We have August before us ! And how wonderful this August holiday is ! It is to the year what a night’s sleep is to the day. We breathe ; we lounge ; we do nothing—and it’s all right : it’s our duty to do nothing, a dear, delicious duty. Only let us do it ! Not the easiest thing in the world, as the August tourist will teach us ! And yet it is a definite, downright duty for honest workers—a time for quiet leisurely thought : a time to lie on our backs and think ; a time to read, and realize what we have read ; a recovery and a preparation ; a thirty-one days bank holiday ! Well ! it’s ours—and we don’t mean to waste it either !

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September



DIVIDE the word, and you derive its meaning. *Septem*-ber ; i.e. *Septem*, seven, and “ber”—a suffix, as Professor Skeat tells us, “of uncertain derivation.” *Septem*, however, is clear enough ; and, although September is our ninth month, according to the old or “Julian” style it was the seventh. For March was then the first month in the year, and September would, of course, have been the seventh month from March. As late, indeed, as the eighteenth century, the year began with March in England, when, by an Act of George II, the legal beginning of the year was changed from March 25th to January 1st.

THE VALUE OF DATES

September, then, is dedicated to no great god or goddess, to no imperial, “august” monarch. It simply means a date.



SEPTEMBER

SEPTEMBER

And it is just in this very fact that it is so full of meaning. For dates loom large in dealing with history. Volumes have been written to prove or disprove the accuracy of a date on which so much may hang. Theology alone (theories about the date of Creation, the books of the Bible, the Creeds of the Church) has contributed a small library to the literature of dates. And did not Mrs. Humphry Ward write a *Robert Elsmere*, depicting *inter alia*, a religious man as holding absurdly enough that the cause of Christianity stood or fell with the date of the Book of Daniel?—and did not the sale of the book witness to its popularity? How unutterably stupid and silly it all seems to us now! “The Higher Critics,” writes a reviewer of the book, “have travelled a long way since *Robert Elsmere* was written, and, so far as we can judge, have done very little harm to Christianity. The last shot is fired, and still the citadel remains—and the common-sense verdict has been reached that it is of small consequence when the Book of Daniel was written, as long as it does undoubtedly expound moral ideas without which nations cannot thrive.”

Is it because dates are so important that every single one of the months, from the first to the

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twelfth, is mentioned in the Bible as fixing the time of some historical fact? Facts are fixed by dates : dates are fixed by facts—as when the fact of the Incarnation is fixed as taking place “ when Cyrenius was governor of Syria,” or the date of the Crucifixion by the governorship of Pontius Pilate. The date-value of our own birthday, Baptismal birthday, Confirmation, first Communion, Wedding, and the hold they take of us as fixing facts in our lives is seen in the good old English custom of observing their anniversaries. So September fixes our month as the seventh from March, and in so doing stirs up in our memories whole chapters of history.

HARVEST FESTIVALS

Our ancestors called September *Gerst-Monath* or *barley month*, as being the month in which the barley—on which so much depended—was harvested. Perhaps the barley-harvest means less for us than it meant for them ; but for us, no less than for them, September is the great harvest month. Harvest Festivals abound this month. And September, if it does nothing else, may well remind us what a Harvest Festival, though not a festival ordered by the Church, really means. What is the root

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idea of a Harvest Festival? It is, of course, thanksgiving for the ingathering of the crops—but it is thanksgiving of a special kind, in a special form. We bring *specimens* of the earth's produce into our churches—and by so doing, according to a well-known principle, we offer a part for the whole. We say, in effect, Here in this fruit, here in this flower, is a token that *all* fruits, *all* flowers belong to God. *De tuis tibi*: “of Thine own do we give Thee.” Thus we bring specimen money into church and offer it as a token that *all* money belongs to God; specimen music as a token that *all* music belongs to Him; and so on. A Harvest Thanksgiving is, indeed, or at least should be, a distant shadow thrown by the Bread and Wine offered in the Church's highest act of thanksgiving, the Eucharist.

“Long since the psalmist-seer foretold
That high upon the hills
God's corn should grow, and now, behold
His promise He fulfils.”

There would be fewer “shop window” shows in the Sanctuary if this root principle was effectively grasped. The strong condemnation of the modern harvest festival by many of our most spiritual Churchmen would be less severe, and indeed

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less deserved, if the real end and object of the thanksgiving were kept more steadily and practically in view. We surely do well to Christianize the old idea involved in the *Gerst-Monath* of the ancients; we surely do no less well in making a special thanksgiving, from Eucharist to harvest hymn, for the produce of the earth upon which we so largely depend for our existence.

TOWN AND COUNTRY

Again: if our "barley month," and all that it stands for, only served, by the mere influx of "harvesters," to bring together town life and country life it would be a month full of meaning. In the thought of September the town folk may take a new look into the lives of village folk, and gain a fresh outlook for themselves. Each may learn something of how the other lives. On the one hand, the gruesome rows of prison-like town houses, with their grim cells, recede from view for a time; on the other hand, the isolated country cottage with its picturesque thatch and creeper—so often a picturesque death-trap in the winter—has brought within it an outside influence. Both sides are the gainers. "Town mouse" and "country

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mouse" — both learn that there are other mice in the world besides themselves. The restless, "see-life"-loving, boy or girl in the country is told, before it is too late, that town life is not all that fancy paints it ; the town worker learns that country life isn't all flowers and fruit ; each, maybe, is left more contented and less self-centred than before. Perhaps too the more thoughtful ones on both sides are reminded that neither can get on without the other ; that interdependence, not independence, forms the essence of success. It is in the combination of the two—men and women, rich and poor, town and country, motherland and colonies, strong and weak—that the road to the goal lies.

"Combine and conquer." It may well be the motto for the month.

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October



AS September is the seventh month from March, so October is the eighth. *Octo*, of course, means eight—and, as *oct*-ave suggests the eighth note in music or the eighth day after a festival, as the *octo*-pus suggests that which has eight feet (*octo* eight, and *pous* a foot), or as *oct*-avo means that which has eight leaves to the sheet, so *Octo*-ber is the eighth month from the first in the old Roman Calendar.

And, as the ancient German name—*Winter-fyllith*, winter month—suggests, October has a wintry sound. It is a difficult month. Summer has gone, and winter has not yet come. It is the *getting* old period—perhaps the most difficult time of all.

TRANSITION TIMES

But what could be more lovely than a fine October day? It belongs to October, and to no other month.



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It is unique. And yet, words and phrases like "decay" and "the fall of the leaf" cannot—perhaps it is well that they cannot—be cut out of October's dictionary. Nature has begun to age. It is in a transition period, and transition times are trying times. It is so in our lives. We are out of touch with August and September, and we haven't settled down to November and December. Physically, too, "the fall of the leaf" is not the most healthy time of the year; and, although the fall of the leaf is not, thank God, the fall of the tree, the physical and the spiritual are so intermingled that we are not surprised to find October, with all its own peculiar beauty, a trying month, "as well for the body as the soul."

But just here is the meaning of the month. It calls for extra effort—and to an Englishman a call to effort is an inspiration. We know what we have to expect, and "forewarned is forearmed." Occasional fits of depression, October moods, autumn's chills, will not take us by surprise, will not be mistaken for anything very serious or unconquerable. They will pass away. The autumn is a distinct stage in the spiritual as in the natural year, and we cannot afford to lose any one month

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from our moral calendar. Trying times are needed times.

GROWING OLD

It is well, too, that our "winter-month" should remind us of what is coming, and should be treated, not as a morbid meditation, but with a manly facing of facts. If the year is growing old, so perhaps are we. We are in the autumn : we are facing "the winter of old age." How are we facing it? As an end, or as a beginning? The answer to our question will make all the difference to our outlook. Old age is not merely an end ; it is a beginning. We are beginning to get ready for "the best time of all." Old age looks on, not back. If the past is a mere bundle of regrets, of poisonous feelings towards our successors, a sulky resentment at being out of the swim, it is a time of self-made misery. Charles Kingsley, with his strong common sense, says, "It is the highest pleasure a man can have who has turned downhill at last, to believe that younger spirits will rise up after him, and catch the lamp of truth, as in the old lamp-bearing race of Greece, out of his hand before it expires, and carry it on to the goal with

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swifter and more even feet." It is interesting to notice how, speaking from the philosophic standpoint, Cicero twits his hearers with their dread of old age : "The principal subject of their complaint was in the first place that they were no longer capable of enjoying the sensual gratifications, without which, in their estimation, life was of no value ; and in the next, that they had found themselves neglected by those who had formerly paid their court to them." And he goes on to give his hearers a very shrewd piece of advice : "They whose desires are properly regulated, and who have nothing morose or petulant in their temper and manners, will find old age, to say the least of it, is a state very easy to be endured ; whereas unsubdued passions, and a froward disposition, will equally embitter every season of human life."

But there is an infinitely happier picture for us Christians ! It has often been noticed that our Lord never grew old. It is well. We cannot associate decay in any sense with Him Who "saw no corruption." But we find, just as we should expect to find, that He did not forget the autumn and winter. He left a lovely legacy to us in the person of His nearest and dearest (save the Mother),

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His best-beloved disciple. He charged S. John with the work of growing old. He trusted him with the periods which carried him into the life of advanced old age. It was a great trust. And it was no easy placid time of growing old. He, the beloved disciple, lived to see the wreck of practically everything, save the one thing which alone really mattered. He had to outlive all his ideals, save the one ideal which never fails. Things he had loved, and planned, and worked for, where are they now? Gone. Or rather they are all collected in one supreme word—experience. We, too, can look back; we can see that nothing short of experience could have steered the Early Church through its waves and storms in those dread days when the Bishop of Ephesus was growing old. "I have been young, and now am old" was his experience, as it may be ours. Happy the soul that has learnt to say it without gall or bitterness, but who can place the experience of the past, tactfully and cheerfully, at the disposal of the present.

It was a favourite saying of the old Latin poet that in the aged "judgement, counsel, and authority" were the virtues which should be displayed. "If," he argues, "abilities of this kind were not the

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peculiar attributes of the old, our wise ancestors would not, surely, have distinguished the supreme council of the State by the appellation of *Senate*.”¹ We meet with the same thought on our word *Alderman*, or *Elderman*, and perhaps *Earl*, *Ealdor*, or *Elder*. The point to remember is that getting old is a distinct stage in life’s year, and has its own distinctive work to do—a work which is not unlikely to be marred if spoilt by regrets as merely “a good time gone.” We can well afford to lose (if indeed we do lose) the good time gone, if we live in the full view of a better time coming.

OCTOBER BEAUTY

Autumn tints, too, have a beauty all their own, a quiet, subdued, wondering beauty, a beauty which one never sees save in October. To make each month beautiful in its turn—that seems to have been the meaning of the months in the Creator’s mind. It’s a hint to us to “go and do likewise.” To make the October of life beautiful isn’t the easiest of tasks, and therefore it is all the more worthy of attainment. It is hard to see less well, to hear less well, to walk less well, even, perhaps,

¹ *Senex*, old.

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to think less well, or with greater effort—all this is uphill work. But it is because it is uphill that the climb is a brave one. The top is in sight, and the air is purer at the top than at the bottom.

“Should sometimes your feet grow weary,
Should sometimes your heart feel faint,
'Tis the toil that makes the pilgrim,
'Tis the Cross that moulds the saint.
Into joys are griefs transfigured
Under Love's constraint.”



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November



GIVE a dog a bad name, and hang it!" To no month in the year does the proverb better apply. November (*novem*, nine), the ninth month of the year in the old Calendars, has, it must be owned, a bad name. Nobody has a good word for it. And, it must also be owned, it is to some extent its own fault! It has brought a disgrace upon its name by bad behaviour, and indeed is not wholly unjustly regarded as the black sheep in the family. For, of all the months, November is the nastiest. It is the least companionable, the most unwelcome. It is very difficult to make a friend of November. Our ancestors called it *Wint-Monath*, or the *Wind Month*—and what with the wind and the rain, the sleet and the snow, the fog and the slush, it is hard to hold a brief for November. There are no lack of witnesses for the prosecution! One of them,

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Tom Hood, indicts the month in well-known satire and humour :—

“ No sun—no moon—
No morn—no noon—
No dawn—no dusk—no proper hour of day—
No sky—no earthly view—
No distance looking blue.
No road, no street, no ‘t’other side of the way’—
No end to any row—
No indication where the crescents go—
No park—no ring—no afternoon gentility—
No company—no nobility.
No warmth—no cheerfulness—no healthful ease—
No comfortable feel in any member—
No shade—no shine—no butterflies—no bees—
No fruits—no flowers—no leaves—no birds,
November ! ”

Well ! it’s a sad indictment, and we can’t even plead an *alibi* on its behalf ! We’ve experienced too much of it ourselves. November in the country makes us long to be in town ! November in town makes us long to be in the country ! The country lanes are unendurable ; the town streets are insufferable ; and so on, and so on !

BRIGHT NOVEMBER

But there is (there always is) something to be said on the other side. Months, like men — or,

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should it be, men like months?—aren't always as black as they are painted. Black sheep are not without their use in a family, bad as they may be.

And, surely, November isn't quite as bad as it used to be.

It really looks as if the other months in the family had been talking to it seriously, and had succeeded to some extent in reforming it. Why, we've had quite warm Novembers of late, and Tom Hood might have to give us another version if he were alive now. Anyhow, it's as well to look on the bright side of it, as of everything else—to see the worst of it, and to make the best of it.

And November is needed. It tells us to be men of *grit*, to endure, to hold on, and to hold out. It says, "Manage circumstances, and don't let circumstances manage you"—or, as our American relations would put it, "Run your own business, and don't let your business run you." Our business is to manage November, and not to let November manage us—to rise above the fogs and the gloom, and to let a bright "within" expel the dark "without"—not to let even the weather affect our

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characters unduly. It is not easy. As Faber so quaintly says :—

“The weather has got no business with us,
And we have none with the weather,
And temper and weather are different things,
But they always go together.”

And, by the way, he adds more seriously :—

“Angels are round thee, and heaven above.
And thy soul is alive within ;
Shall a rainy day, and a cloudy sky,
Make a Christian heart to sin ?”

SHINE THROUGH THE GLOOM

This, then, is our November thought—and we may borrow some help, amid all the gloom of our month, from our old English way of facing the enemy. It is a great thing to face facts ; it is a greater thing to fight them. Here is November ! Here is the fact ! It is, by consent of all, the gloomiest month in the year ; It is our business to light up the gloom. “The light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth [‘seizeth,’ ‘catcheth’] it not.” The dark was indeed chasing the light in history when the words were written, but the light shone through the darkness, and scattered the confounding gloom. It has been so ever since.

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Few periods in the story of our Church have things looked more gloomy than when, in 1846, Mr. Lyte wrote "Abide with me." One can imagine that sullen, leaden "November" period, when a simple, spiritual priest of the Church of England framed the prayer which thousands of us have used in many a gloomy moment since :—

"Shine through the gloom,
And point me to the skies."

Contrast the Church of England as she then was with what—with all her spots—she now is. Or, think of her as she was when Archbishop Laud, on a Visitation through his diocese, found the altar used for hats and sticks, and as a "table" on which the churchwardens made up their accounts. Or, think of the condition of things when the same Archbishop had to forbid cock-fights outside the sanctuary gates. Gloom enough then ! And how the light has "shone through the gloom" and "pointed us to 'the skies'"—to higher ideals and happier times.

And, surely, it is our own experience in many a November fog in life. Gloomy times, November days, are bound to come to us all. I remember some time ago staying in a country house, and

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discussing, late in the evening, many anxieties which at the moment looked dark and gloomy—questions concerning education, poverty, sin, divorce, personal worries. During the night I dreamed of our talk, and saw in my dream a figure bending over me, pointing to a picture hidden in a corner of the room which I could not see—a room in which I had never been before. It all seemed so real that I awoke and lit a candle. Curiously enough, on moving about the room I came across a picture, the centre of which was a cross with prickly foliage, and under the cross the words painted :

“Shine through the gloom,
And point me to the skies.”

Much seemed mystic and strange about it, but the one thing which was neither mystic nor strange was the clear-cut leading to see the light shining in the darkness, to read the common-sense prosaic meaning of the vision, and to remember that November was only one out of twelve months in the year—and that November itself has but thirty days !

If November has a bad name—well, we won't “hang it,” but we will see something in it worth keeping.

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NOVEMBER SAINTS' DAYS

We might see something, too, in the gallery of Saints' Days in our November calendar—days commemorating saints, men and women, from every part of the Church, from all parts of the world—hinting to us not to be insular, not to be narrow; reminding us that, as our Prayer Book Calendar teaches, we are Catholic. How greatly it would help to do away with prejudice and pettiness if we would only be as Catholic as our Prayer Book is in the days retained in our November Calendar.

But “time is up!”—and if it were not, we should probably end by proving November to be the brightest bit of the year, and of all the family of months “the best of the bunch”—“which,” as Euclid would say, “is absurd!”

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December



LIKE its three brothers, December takes its name from its position in the family of months. In old calendars it was No. 10, *decem* being the Latin for ten—as seen in “decemvir,” one of ten magistrates, “decimate,” to kill every tenth man, “decimal,” relating to tens. Born last, it is yet the oldest month in the year.

CHRISTMAS IS COMING

And there is one day in the month, so supreme in importance, so overtowering in dignity, that we instinctively follow the leading of our Christian forefathers (who, because of it, changed the old name *Winter-Monath* into *Heligh-Monath*), and call it the holy month: and, with our kinsmen the Germans, *Christ-Monat*—Christ-Month. The day consecrates the month; the month suggests the day. “Christmas is coming” is the atmosphere in



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which every child up to threescore years and ten lives from the first of December. And if some *Gabriel Grub* denies it—why the shops prove it! Q.E.D.!

But what is the root-reason of it all? Is it not that, as Campbell says, “coming events cast their shadows before,” and that no event in the history of the world can for a moment compare in historical or human importance with the birth of the Christ-Child? It is still the central time-point of every one of the twelve months in the year. As Rome had its golden milestone in the Forum from which all roads started, and all distances were measured, so Bethlehem has its golden milestone in the Manger, and all events are important or unimportant according to their relative distance to A.D. or B.C. Birth registers, baptismal registers, marriage registers, census registers—their entries are all measured as so many years, months, days, from the Great Census Day when Joseph registered the Holy Family in the records of the City of David.

“His Name is still ‘the Prince of Peace,’
He comes our joy to be:
And birthdays bright owe all their light
To His Nativity.”

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ANNO DOMINI

Anno Domini meets us everywhere—in the daily papers, the monthly magazines, the quarterly numbers, the Christmas annuals : they are all dated as being published at such and such a distance from the Incarnation. The ledgers, the day books, the Christmas cards, the letters we dash off in unthinking haste—they are all related through their dates to that memorable December in the sacred century in which Christ was born. The Christmas entertainment, the Christmas Service, the Christmas concert, the annual *Messiah* at the Albert Hall—they all tell the same story as their dates announce their fixture ; for they are fixed at a time which is related to the coming of the Messiah, to the first singing of the *Gloria in Excelsis*.

And, looked at merely as a date, like any other date in history, how near the Birthday seems. It seems but as yesterday that God came down to live with us—"became what He was not, without ceasing to be what He was." And if we think of the variations in time east and west of Greenwich, and remember the hour and a half difference there is between Christmas in England and Christmas

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in (say) Natal, time seems bridged over like some obstructing river, and the event comes closer than ever. Why, twenty long lives, one after the other, would forge a chain of hands by which the last could grasp the hand of one who had been at Bethlehem on the night of the Nativity. The date is not unimportant if it helps us to believe the doctrine.

CHRISTMAS JOY

Is it not because so many forget its meaning that Christmas is such a miserable time to them? They dislike it, it bores them, they long for it to be over, they have lost touch with the natural delights of the season—and they have nothing to take its place. It means nothing to them now because it never really meant anything but fun. Fun has, indeed, its place—fun based on fact, fun the outcome of the fact, fun for us who enter into the teaching and environment of the 25th of December as for no one else; only our fun has a foundation. The Christmas tree is not less real, it is more real, because, for us, it leads to the Holy Rood, and tells of the Tree of Life which is for the healing of the nations' hurt. The Christmas

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decorations are not less real, they are more real, because in the red berries we see a symbol of "the coming agony," because in the everlastings we see a token of undaunted, never-failing love. The Christmas boxes are not less real, they are more real, because we regard them as something more than a dead relic of a pagan custom, and make them shadows of our gifts to the Christ-Child. The Christmas greetings are not less real, they are more real, because our first greeting has been "Christians, awake ! salute the happy morn." Our "merry Christmas [we love the words] and happy New Year" mean more, not less, when, in spite of our sins, we have learnt the gaily and heart-merriment of a happiness based on the teaching of the early Christmas bells.

" Mean no more, but glory crowned,
Is our Bethlehem to-day ;
Thus, while angels gather round,
Penitents may kneel and say—
' We were lost, and we are found,
Therefore are we gay.' "

Poor, poor folk ! who, however cross-grained life may be, find no happiness in making others happy "on Christmas Day in the morning." God mend their misery, and give them to see things cheerily.

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"MAKING IT UP"

But there seems one thought which, somehow or other, we all have on December 25th. It is a good old English custom (because it is a good old Christian custom) to make up quarrels, to set things straight, to smooth out roughness, at Yuletide. To make our Christmas Communion with a quarrel not made up, is as little to be thought of as not to make it at all. We cannot stay away; we cannot go as we are. Remedies are within reach. It is for each to use the remedy the Church offers to meet the case. However absurd it may seem to make "a season" the reason for making up a quarrel, it is more absurd still to let it pass without so doing. "Peace on earth" is one of the meanings of the day. The thought is very beautifully embodied in a Christmas poem by Allen Whitworth, once Vicar of All Saints', Margaret Street. The opening and closing verses are specially suggestive:—

"When man and spouse estranged have been,
A little child hath come between.
The man beholds his image there,
The mother owns the mother's care,
And both are one
In that dear son.

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When God and man estranged have been,
The little Child hath come between ;
Both Son of God and Son of Man,
Ordained by love's divinest plan.
 So peace is made
 And love displayed.

Then joy we that the Holy Child
Our hearts to God hath reconciled.
So friend be reconciled to friend
In Christmas greetings, quarrels end,
 Contentions cease,
 And all be peace."

A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR

So at least we may know something of that heart-gaiety, that deep inner "merriment" wrapt up in the old English Christmas greeting, "A merry Christmas, and a happy New Year."

"So we keep the olden greeting
 With its meaning deep and true,
And wish a merrie Christmas
 And a happy New Year to you."

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